

Yesterday, The Illinois Industrial University, Today, The University of Illinois

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In 1868, the doors of the Illinois Industrial University opened, with the promise of learning in the air. The Illinois Industrial University, now known as the University of Illinois, was opened as a result of the Morrill Land Grant Act. This act allowed the states to establish new types of schools of a higher learning. Urbana and Champaign put together a bid wanting the University's home to be located in between their towns. Their bid consisted of \$2,000 through \$100,000 for the building and grounds, county bonds, free freight on Illinois Central Railroad, landscaping, and 970 acres of farmland. The total bid was valued around \$285,000. Both Urbana and Champaign, wanting more assurance, wined and dined the legislators, hoping to win their approval. Even though their bid was not the preeminent of the four competing counties, when the votes were counted, Urbana and Champaign came out on top. Once the location was decided, the University and its faculty could now focus on other important issues.

The University wanted to emphasize industrial education without excluding other scientific and classical studies. However, without the help of the university's first president, John Milton Gregory, the university might have developed into more of a technical school, and may not have been recognized as the University of Illinois we know today. Gregory fought for literature and language courses, even though some thought they were not useful in agriculture and industry. But Gregory continued his push, stayed involved in the school, and always wanted to remain a part of the university. His last wish was to be buried on campus and he lies there today.

The university sits between the two cities, Champaign and Urbana, Illinois. Originally, only one and a half miles of muddy fields separated the two towns. It is on these fields that the University of Illinois found a home between the Illinois Central station in Champaign and the Urbana courthouse. By 1868, the two towns reached a combined population of 5,000 people. The university was chartered in 1867, and opened its doors one year later. At first, the university consisted of only one building, a vacant building that once housed a girls' academy. It included classrooms, a lecture hall, a laboratory, a museum, a library, and on the top floor, dormitories for the students. Since space was limited, Gregory's office, also served as the school's library. By March 2, 1868, the university's faculty consisted of only two professors, who taught Astronomy, Butler's Analogy, Elocution, Evidences of Christianity, History of Inductive Sciences, Mental Philosophy, and Penmanship to a class of fifty students. It is amazing that only two professors taught seven classes a day, starting at 7:00 in the morning and not finishing until 5:00 in the evening.

Students needed to meet only two requirements to be accepted to the university. First, they had to be at least fifteen years of age, and take a sixty-five-question test, and score seventy percent or better. The students were given certificates upon their arrival at the university. Since the board wanted an Eastern tradition to remain, certificates replaced the student's degrees or diplomas. Those who were accepted spent at least two hours a day performing manual labor around campus. The students or cadets could be called to serve in the Illinois National Guard in case of an emergency. In addition, each week the cadets were required to drill three hours under the watchful eye of a Civil War officer. In full uniform, the cadets marched daily to and from the chapel. College colors were not

even established until the university received its present name, the University of Illinois, in 1885. Believe it or not, the university's first colors were not the famous orange and blue that we see today, but cardinal red and silver.

When the university was first opened athletics were not offered to the students. As a result, the students began forming their own teams. Because baseball and track were the most favored sports, and were very popular among the students, they designed their own teams for these two sports. Then, during the 1870s, a new game, football, was organized and became more popular. The first unofficial game of football was played at the University in 1876.

Two years later, Samuel C. Stanton, a student, brought a football from England and began teaching other students the basics of the game. Football was soon recognized as a "brutal sport", leading faculty members to ban the game. Just a few years later, an edition of the 1880 student newspaper posed the question, "Can not foot-ball be revived among us? There is a woeful need of some such game to call forth the energy and enthusiasm of all the students." According to historian Winton Solberg, the students continued to play "an occasional game of drive, kick-about, or a class rush, or a rough-and-tough game that bore a slight resemblance to the Canadian game [rugby]," throughout the 1880s.

In 1889, Scott Williams, a fan of the game, organized a football team at the university. With the permission of the Athletic Association his team represented the university at the Intercollegiate Oratorical Contest. By the end of the season, football had finally become an intercollegiate sport at the University. Now, one hundred and thirty-seven years later, the University of Illinois still thrives, athletically and academically.

Besides athletics, other activities were offered. One activity was theatre. The first theatrical performance was pantomimed and presented to the public on December 5– 6, 1872. Just three years later, the first play, “the by-play from A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” was performed.

“Let Illinois become one of the holy places in the history of human spirit,” that was the last statement of Edmund Janes James, the University’s fifth president. His words, still today, ring true. [From Roger Ebert, An Illini Century – One Hundred Years of Campus Life; Richard Gordan Moores, Fields of Rich Toil; Mike Pearson, Illini Legends, Lists & Lore, 100 Years of Big Ten Heritage; Winton U. Solberg, The University of Illinois 1867-1894; Winton U. Solberg, The University of Illinois 1894 – 1904; The University of Illinois Press. Illini Years, A Picture History of The University of Illinois.]